

²² And [Jacob] arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. ²³ He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. ²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. ²⁵ Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. ²⁶ And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" ²⁷ So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." ²⁸ And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." ³¹ Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

Text: Genesis 32:22-31 A 3-19-25 Psalm 16 Responsive Psalm: 20
Hymns: 166, 459, 521, 179

OUR NAME IS ISRAEL, TOO

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Together with his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac, Jacob is known as one of the three patriarchs whose Descendant was Jesus. Twenty years before our text took place, Jacob had successfully schemed against his brother, Esau, and taken the right of the first born from him. Esau was so angry that he wanted to kill Jacob. Jacob ran away and lived with his mother's relatives. There he continued to rely too much on himself and not enough on God. But the Lord remained faithful to Jacob, patiently teaching him, and blessing him. Finally the Lord told Jacob to go back home.

Our text begins with Jacob and his large family and their many possessions nearly home. Jacob found out that his brother, Esau, was coming toward him with four hundred men! We're told, "*Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed*" (Ge. 32:6-7), not knowing if Esau still wanted to kill him. Jacob sent five different herds as gifts to Esau, hoping to pacify Esau with his generosity and friendship. Jacob divided his large group into two smaller groups so that in case Esau attacked one group the other could escape. Jacob finally sent his two wives and their children on ahead. We're told, "*Then Jacob was left alone.*"

God appeared in human form and wrestled with Jacob. Jacob was afraid of Esau and what he might do. Jacob was human, and he needed reassurance and strengthening from God.

God lets us 'wrestle' with Him in prayer, bringing whatever is on our heart and mind to Him. We have all of God's promises in His Word that He will help us and see us through everything we have to do or bear. But like Jacob, we're human, and we need reassurance and strengthening from God, too.

God could have dealt Jacob a crushing blow and defeated him easily. Instead He touched Jacob's hip, dislocating it and causing Jacob to walk with a limp. The limp served as a reminder to Jacob that God was with him, and that he needed to depend on God in everything.

Dislocating Jacob's hip might seem like a harsh lesson from God. But it's not our place to question God and tell Him how He should do things. Jacob and all of us are unworthy sinners who don't deserve anything from God. But God in His grace wants us to pray to Him. God always hears our prayers, and answers us in the way He knows is best for us. God always helps us and blesses us.

God let Jacob wrestle with Him all night. It was almost morning, and it was time to stop the wrestling match. Jacob was unable to wrestle any more. But he held onto God and wouldn't let Him go until God blessed him. Jacob was tired and crippled. He couldn't run away, or try to fight Esau. All Jacob could do was hold onto God and His promises.

Sometimes we've prayed a long time about something, and God still hasn't answered us. We're tempted to give up. But Jesus tells us, literally, "*Keep asking..., keep seeking..., keep knocking...,*" promising us that "*everyone who asks receives*" (Mt. 7:7ff.). God invites us and even tells us to pray to Him. God promises that He will answer us. God wants us to keep on praying about something and not give up until He answers us.

God asked Jacob, "*What is your name?*" to remind him that he had been Jacob, which means "heel grabber." He had been the schemer who relied too much on himself. He had learned, sometimes the hard way, to rely on God instead. Now God renamed Jacob, calling him "*Israel,*" which means, "he who strives with God." Jacob had striven with God, so to speak, in prayer. God had worked a change in Jacob. Jacob had learned to rely on God for the help he needed.

Jacob called the place where he had wrestled with God "*Peniel,*" which means, "face of God." He had seen God, albeit in human form. God had allowed him to wrestle with Him in prayer. God had heard his prayers. Jacob could now face Esau with God's assurance that He would be with him and bless him. It turned out that Esau received him warmly. God worked everything out fine.

God doesn't live our lives for us. We have to face our problems, and face life. God assures us over and over in His Word that He is with us, and that He blesses us. We can hold onto God and His precious promises in His Word. Jesus assures us, "*I am with you always*" (Mt. 28:20). "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" (Ro. 8:28)

We're not always faithful to God. As the hymnwriter says, "How ungrateful we have been in repaying love with sin" (TLH #11:2). Like Jacob, all too often we rely too much on ourselves, and not enough on God and His plans for us. Thankfully, as Paul told Timothy, "*If we are*

faithless, [God] remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). How blessed we are that, as God remained faithful to Jacob, so God is always faithful to us.

God could have left Jacob to fend for himself, but He didn't. We deserve for God to leave us to fend for ourselves, but He doesn't. He assures us, *"I will not leave you nor forsake you"* (Josh. 1:5). God loves us so much that He gave us His Son, Jesus. Jesus died for all of our sins on the cross, and rose again. Our sins are forgiven. Since God was willing to give us His Son, that means that we're very precious to Him (Is. 43:4). God wants us to wrestle with Him in prayer. He tells us, *"Pour out your heart before [Me]"* (Ps. 62:8). As with Jacob, God always hears and answers our prayers. God's will for us is always good.

Paul says, *"They are not all Israel who are [descendants] of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the [descendants] of Abraham.... That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the [descendants]"* (Ro. 9:6-8). Abraham believed in the coming Savior. We believe in the Savior who has come. We believe in the same Savior Abraham believed in. By the grace of God we believe in Jesus. You and I are Abraham's, and so Jacob's, spiritual descendants. Like Jacob, our name is Israel, too. God allows us to wrestle with Him in prayer. God hears our prayers, and answers us. God helps us and blesses us. God always keeps His Word.

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare, Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He Himself has bid thee pray, Therefore will not say thee nay.

While I am a pilgrim here, Let Thy love my spirit cheer;
As my Guide, My Guard, my Friend, Lead me to my journey's end.

Show me what I have to do; Every hour my strength renew.
Let me live a life of faith; Let me die Thy people's death. Amen. (TLH #459:1, 6-7)